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RIGHTS OF PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL OR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Note verbale dated 21 September 1994 from the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

The Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations at Geneva has the honour to transmit, enclosed herewith, information on the status of the Bulgarian Minority in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, prepared by the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with the request that it be circulated as an official document of the fifty-first session of the Commission on Human Rights, under item 20, "Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities", of the draft provisional agenda.

GE.94-14833 (E)

Status of the Bulgarian minority in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

1. During the last census, in 1991, 26,922 inhabitants of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, i.e. 0.2 per cent of the total population, declared themselves Bulgarians. In terms of their number, Bulgarians are the tenth minority group in the State. Persons belonging to the Bulgarian minority live in central Serbia, and are most numerous in the communes of Bosilegrad (72.9 per cent of the inhabitants of this commune), Dimitrovgrad (52.5 per cent) and Surdulica (6.2 per cent).

2. Persons belonging to national minorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including the Bulgarian minority, enjoy, on a basis of equality with other citizens, all human rights guaranteed in international instruments on human rights, as well as additional minority rights; the latter go beyond the provisions of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Minority rights in Yugoslavia go beyond those in the majority of countries in the world, and particularly beyond those granted to the Serbian and Montenegrin minorities in countries that recognize their existence.

3. The federal State and the member republics (Serbia and Montenegro) have been defined under the Constitution as states based on the equality of all their citizens, the state being not defined as the state of the leading nation. It is in line with that commitment that all citizens, whether they belong to the Serbian and Montenegrin nation or any of the national minorities or ethnic groups, enjoy an identical level of human rights and freedoms, guaranteed under the Constitution. Also, minority members are guaranteed, either as individuals or collectively, some special rights, such as: the use of their own language and script, the right to education and public information in their own language, the right to found educational or cultural organizations or associations, the right to establish and maintain unhindered relations in the country and abroad, with members of their nation living in other States, etc. Under the Constitution, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia recognizes and guarantees the right of national minorities to the preservation, development and expression of their ethnic, linguistic and other specific characteristics, as well as to the use of national symbols in accordance with international law.

4. It is stipulated under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that in areas of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia where national minorities live their languages and scripts shall be in official use.

5. In Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad, communes with a majority Bulgarian population, the highest legal acts of the communes, their Statues, stipulate that, in addition to the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script, the Bulgarian language and script are simultaneously in official use. All the communal bodies and other organizations exercising public authority use the Bulgarian language on an equal footing with the Serbian language. Geographical names, the names of streets, enterprises and other public signs are written in both languages. The Bulgarian language is used in both written and oral interchange between organs and organizations, as well as with parties, i.e. citizens, in proceedings conducted to give effect to and protect

the rights, duties and responsibilities of citizens, in the maintenance of records, the issuance of public documents, etc.

6. Every citizen of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, whether a member of a minority or majority group, is equally entitled to share in the distribution of power at all levels under equal conditions.

7. In the commune of Dimitrovgrad which has the following national mix: 52.5 per cent Bulgarians, 22.5 per cent Serbs, 22.4 per cent Yugoslavs and 2.6 per cent others, members of the Bulgarian national minority have 97 per cent of the representation in the communal assembly. The president of the commune, the secretary and the president of the executive board are members of the Bulgarian national minority. Of the total number of judges of the communal court, 75 per cent are Bulgarians, as is also the president of the court; 66 per cent of all those employed in the Department of the Interior, including its head, and 89 per cent of directors of enterprises are Bulgarians. In the commune of Bosilegrad, all the delegates to the communal assembly are members of the Bulgarian minority.

8. Education is organized in the languages of minorities at all levels from pre school to higher education. In elementary and secondary schools the curricula and programmes for members of national minorities are delivered in their mother tongue if a minimum of 15 pupils enrol in the first grade, and also for a smaller number of pupils with the approval of the Minister of Education. The possibility of bilingual instruction also exists, or that of additional mother tongue classes including elements of the national culture.

9. In the Dimitrovgrad elementary school and high school, instruction is provided in any of the three ways envisaged by the law, depending on the choice of the pupils and their parents. The total number of pupils in the elementary school is 1,056, with 93 per cent of the school staff, as well as the school principal being members of the Bulgarian national minority. The high school has 260 pupils; the principal and 90 per cent of the staff are Bulgarians. The high school in Dimitrovgrad is one of the most modern secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia and the Republic supplied the funds invested in equipping it (except for 10 per cent local voluntary contributions). Two hundred students of Bulgarian nationality are attending universities in Serbia.

10. The right of members of national minorities to be informed in their own language is not only guaranteed under the Constitution and laws, but budgetary resources are also allocated to that end.

11. The "Bratstvo" paper and publishing house, which publishes in the Bulgarian language, issues one informative weekly, a childrens' paper and a literary magazine. Funds are regularly earmarked from the budget of the Republic of Serbia for its publishing expenses and the salaries of the staff. The Radio Television of Serbia broadcasts daily on Radio Niš a programme in the Bulgarian language lasting 15 minutes, on Sundays 30 minutes, and Television Belgrade also broadcasts a weekly newsreel lasting 15 minutes. Within the framework of the last distribution of frequencies tender the Government of the Republic of Serbia allocated a frequency to the assembly of the commune of Dimitrovgrad.

12. The cultural activities of the members of the Bulgarian national minority are of a long-standing tradition and play a special role in the preservation and fostering of national identity. Cultural and artistic work unfolds through the operation of culture centres in Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad. There are two culture and art societies of the Bulgarian national minority, as well as the "Hristo Botev" amateur theatre with plays in the Bulgarian language. The municipal library of Dimitrovgrad has a stock of about 30,000 titles in the Bulgarian language and the municipal library in Bosilegrad about 14,000 titles. International cooperation traditionally takes the form of the interchange of cultural programmes and guest performances with cultural institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria.

13. The declining economic power in the country, considerably contributed to by the United Nations Security Council sanctions, has detracted from the basic conditions for the exercise of human rights, as well as from the State's capacity to assist minority institutions and organizations. The Democratic Association of Bulgarians, a registered political organization, but one with a small number of members and little political influence, takes advantage of this situation, seeking to have seen as deliberate neglect of minority rights on the part of the State the situation, for example, regarding the financing of minority papers. Such papers are confronted with a crisis like all other papers, and in fact the State is exerting efforts and succeeding to maintain them even under these conditions.

14. The fact is that the Bulgarian legislature does not recognize the existence in that country of national minorities, but only ethnic groups, regardless of numerical or other particularities of such "groups".

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